

POLICING UNDER STRAIN: STRUCTURAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES OF THE NIGERIA POLICE FORCE IN ILORIN EMIRATE (1960-2003)

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Abstract

The legacy of colonial authoritarianism, prolonged military rule, and a highly centralised policing structure shaped policing in Ilorin Emirate between 1960 and 2003. They also entrenched corruption, brutality, poor community relations, and institutional inefficiency. This study investigates the structural, political, socio-economic, and organizational challenges that weakened the performance and legitimacy of the Nigeria Police Force in the Emirate during this period. Using a historical-analytical method, the study draws on documentary evidence from scholarly literature, constitutional instruments, newspaper reports, and oral accounts from police personnel and residents to assess patterns of policing and their implications. The findings reveal a wide array of interconnected problems including structural and institutional challenges. This includes pervasive corruption, excessive use of force, poor funding, inadequate training, politicization, proliferation of informal security outfits, weak intelligence gathering, lack of technological capacity, poor response to distress calls, shortage of personnel, and widespread indiscipline, which collectively undermine police effectiveness and public trust. The study concludes that meaningful reforms, such as decentralisation of policing, improvement of welfare and training, depoliticization, technological modernisation, and strengthening of community-police partnerships, are essential for rebuilding legitimacy and enhancing security outcomes in Ilorin Emirate and Nigeria.

Keywords: Nigeria Police Force, Ilorin Emirate, Corruption, Police brutality, Public trust

Introduction

For effective policing to thrive, there is a need for a Police Force that is civil and humane in its approach. However, the Nigeria Police Force is military in its orientation. The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) is a colonial legacy (Tamuno, 2009). During the colonial period, the police force was used to coerce the Nigerian public to obey colonial laws. Thus, the colonial Nigeria Police Force was military in its operations and combative in its approach. The national elite in Nigeria inherited an alien police institution that was built as an instrument of domination and coercion (Marenin, 2009).

In the pre-colonial era, Ilorin before becoming an emirate had various forms of policing such as *elaso* among others. With the Emirate system, the Dogarai system was entrenched. By becoming an emirate after the 1804 Jihad war, the initial form of policing was discarded. In the new arrangement, recruitment into the Dogarai policing as it was in the Hausa-Fulani Emirates were of slave background and religion was a secondary condition. Aside from recruitment, its management and organisation required a new established set of laws known as Sharia in which societal norms were anchored the way pre-colonial police were recruited and organised. By this, communities were policed by local people who knew and understood the terrain and the people. However, all these changed with the coming of the Europeans. This communal pre-colonial policing was further desecrated by the introduction of foreign or alien cultures through colonial rule. The adoption of the western culture of policing without adapting it to the values of community spirit, selflessness and service which were exhibited by the pre-colonial mode of policing had a negative effect on mutual understanding and trust in relationships between the police and community in Nigeria. The years of military rule in post-independent Nigeria also deepened the culture of brutality and violence which was carried over from the colonial period. Thus, policing in Nigeria was conducted within the national context of hostility to members of the public and poor knowledge of human rights among the majority of policemen (Okeshola & Mudiare, 2013). As Alemika (2010) asserts that, between 1966 and 1975, the Nigerian Police Force enjoyed its most prestigious era, having been integrated into military governance. However, from 1983 to 1999, the force experienced a significant decline in status and influence within government.

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This view is supported by the argument that prolonged military rule in Nigeria, particularly before the 21st century, shaped the structure and functioning of the Police in ways that limited its autonomy. Military leaders allegedly configured the Police to avoid institutional rivalry and to preserve the dominance and public prestige of the Armed Forces. As Alemika (2010) further observed that at different periods in the post-colonial history of Nigeria, the police were neglected in terms of funding and equipping because the military feared that a strong police force constituted a threat to their excesses. Hence, the Military which ruled for most of the period believed that empowering the police force may be like empowering a counter-force for a military coup, thus the police was undermined in its position as the primary institution responsible for internal security promoting and protecting. The implication of the military emasculation of the police force was that it heightened corruption and under-competence in the Nigerian police force.



Figure 1: Map showing the Districts in the Five Local Government Areas in Ilorin Emirate

This paper examines the challenges of policing Ilorin Emirate in the post-colonial era, 1960-2003. The local government areas (LGAs) within the Ilorin Emirate are identified as: Ilorin West, Ilorin East, Ilorin South, Moro, and Asa. The first three constitute Ilorin metropolis, while Moro and Asa are surrounding LGAs that fall under the traditional authority of the Emir of Ilorin. Understanding this would help policymakers and stakeholders in policing and security studies. It further helps to document the challenges of the institution within the period and show if there is change and/or continuity.

Challenges of Policing in Ilorin Emirate, 1960-2003

1. Structural Challenges

Police Corruption

One of the major factors that contribute to the negative perception of the police by the people is corruption. Some notable columnists such as George Okoro (1985) and Abdul-Ganiyu Salman (The Punch 1987 & Daily Times 1989) noted that the police are to blame for the negative public perception and sour relations that developed with the public over time. It also inhibits active collaboration between the police and the public in security and crime control in Ilorin Emirate, Kwara State. Public perception of the police in Kwara State is influenced by endemic corruption and other vices. While corruption is an endemic national problem in Nigeria, the police occupy a prominent position as the number one most corrupt institution in Nigeria and the Police have always been at the receiving end of what? (Premium Times, 2020). When a police CSP, Sybil Akinfenwa was asked for her opinion on corruption in the Police, she said:

...the feelings of everybody is that corruption is only in the Nigerian Police Force but you have a very good picture of it. And I want to let you know that the Nigeria Police is the only organisation that is punishing those who are found in corrupt practices (Busayo & Asogbon, 2015).

The widespread corruption in the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) results in harassment and abuse of ordinary citizens. On many occasions, ordinary citizens in Kwara State are manhandled by armed police officers who request bribes and harass them as a means of extorting money. The abuses committed by the police include; unlawful arrest and detention of suspected criminals or even innocent citizens, threats and acts of violence (such as sexual assault, torture, and even extrajudicial killings) (Human Rights Watch, 2010). The police also extort money from victims of crimes before initiating investigations and there are also instances when the police demand bribes from suspects to drop investigations (Osaretin, 2014). These and many acts of perversion and corruption in the police have led to a lack of public trust and confidence in the police. This seriously hinders the possibilities of active collaboration between the police and the public in crime prevention and control. As Solomon Arase once puts it, "The loss of public respect and confidence in the police as well as our inability to effectively tackle crimes in the most ethical and professional manner have been widely attributed to the challenge of corruption within the policing system" (Ojukwu, 2016).

Corruption has also spilled into deployments, promotion and joining some of the Special Forces or investigations which are regarded as juicy postings. In other words, there are allegations that some police personnel pay to get promotions and certain postings. As Alemika (2010) puts it:

Majority only trained to shoot guns but lacked other police ethics and discipline. Majority of the policemen deployed to Ilorin like other places often lack local knowledge of their new deployment. The inadequate payment that policemen take is also a challenge because they use it as an excuse to seek supplementary funds. Revisiting cases in new deployments is another challenge that causes a lot of bottlenecks for the police force.

The perception of the police as corrupt no doubt results in a trust gap that defines the relationship between the public and the police. On most occasions, citizens with useful information on committed crimes refuse to volunteer such information to prevent being falsely accused by the police of conspiracy in the crime. The demand for payment from victims of crime before initiating an investigation on crime by some officers of the Police also discourages victims of crime from reporting committed crimes to the police. The police were also involved in the arbitrary closure of case files, escorts of contraband and stolen goods, stealing of property from the crime suspects, victims of accident and taking bribes or gratifications in order to decline arrest of suspects are some of the unfortunate indulgences of police officers in Nigeria. By and large, the corrupt tendencies of some officers of the Police force make it difficult for the members of the public to relate freely with the police.

Centralisation and Bureaucracy

The centralisation of the Nigeria Police Force is another factor that militates against policing in Ilorin Emirate, Kwara State. A form of decentralisation of the police just like the old system of Dogarai would have been the best form of community policing in the post-colonial era in the emirate, the nationalisation of the police had decimated the powers of native police or Dogarai and they were relegated to the palace.

The current organization climate in the Nigeria Police is negatively skewed towards a concentration of power and authority without adequate and effective delegation. The top-bottom approach to policing is an antithesis to the bottom-top approach of the erstwhile Dogarai system. The colonial legacy of policing by coercion and not by cooperation and consent also resulted in the reluctance of police officers to relinquish their traditional powers by consulting with the public (Rotimi, 2006). Having entrenched a professional culture where coercion is elevated over consultation, the police officers find it hard to shift to a new approach that emphasises values and ethics. Consultation and partnership with the public is thus considered as a weak and soft approach to policing in the rank and file of the force. This institutional reluctance to partner with the public undermines the efforts of government and other concerned groups in initiating police-public partnerships in crime control and prevention.

Those benefiting from the status quo resist decentralisation, viewing community policing as a threat to their authority and traditional law-and-order power (Ford, Weissbein & Plamondon, 2003). Successive military and civilian regimes have maintained this military idea of a centralized Police Force. The centralisation was captured by the 1979 Constitution and restated in section 214(1) of the 1999 Nigeria constitution that:

There shall be a Police Force for Nigeria, which shall be known as the Nigeria Police Force, and subject to the provisions of this Section no other Police Force shall be established for the Federation, or any part thereof (Ehinder, 2001).

The above shows that the constitution places a high premium on the centralisation of the Police. This has further heightened the issue of bureaucracy where regional leaders and governors had no power to control the institution. This has further subjected the Governor of the states to the whims and caprices of the Federal Executive or the presidency who would have to give the nod to the Police to carry out a lawful duty ordered by a state governor. As the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) states:

...the Governor of a State or Such Commissioner of the Government of the State as he may authorise in that behalf, may give to the Commissioner of Police of that state such lawful directions with respect to the maintenance and securing of public order within the State as he may consider necessary, and the Commissioner of Police shall comply with those directions cause them to be complied with...Provided that before carrying out such directions under the foregoing provisions of this subsection, the Commissioner of Police may request that the matter be referred to the President or such Minister of the Government of the Federation as may be authorised in that behalf by the President for his directions.

This arrangement no doubt faults the federal character of Nigeria's constitution. As such, the police were given too much centralization at the centre. Such centralisation of police and its bureaucratic loopholes have further deepened the communication gap between the Police and the populace in Ilorin, Kwara State as there is a disconnect between the police and the Ilorin Emirate there is an established communication link, but policing can be easier. Any wonder then that Assistant Superintendent of Police, Ajayi Okansanmi noted that effective communication channels between the public and police allow the public to address their concerns on crime waves, police corruption, bribery, partisanship, discrimination in arrests, brutality, and poor police-public relations (Oral Interview, 2019).

Brutal Use of Force

The combative approach of the NPF is a serious challenge to effective collaboration between the police and the public in crime prevention and control. The Nigeria Police Force sees itself more as a "Police Force" than a "Police Service". The conduct of the police in Kwara state is dominated by the treatment of alleged suspects and even innocent citizens with the use of excessive force. Police personnel engage in the manhandling of innocent and suspected members of the public using the slightest opportunity. In most cases, police officers forcefully extort confessions from the alleged crime suspects (Dambazau, 2007). There were also cases of extra-judicial killings of crime suspects in police custody.

Table 1: Some reported cases of police brutality and arrests, 1999-2000

Year / Date	Location	Victim(s) / People killed	Short description	Source
21 Dec 1999	Ilorin (Kwara)	Unspecified — reports of deaths	Following attacks and clashes, “hundreds of policemen” backed by armour were reported to have taken over churches in Ilorin during violent disturbances; reports describe clashes with fatalities.	https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2001/12/03/youths-vandalise-churches-kwara-state-capital
23 Dec 1999	Ilorin (Kwara)	2 people (reported)	Newspaper summary: “Two Killed As Police, Moslem Fanatics Clash” — the press reported two people feared dead during clashes in Ilorin.	https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/1999/12/21/police-stoned-near-churches

While two cases may have only appeared, other cases were unreported in the media. The propensity to use force even when consultation and discussion would have been more effective is a bottleneck to effective police-public relationships in Ilorin Emirate, Kwara state.

The Political Economy

While most of the challenges of the police force are often approached from the viewpoint of the structural defects of the force, there is a need to mention how socio-economic activities of members of society affect the effectiveness of the police force. The Nigerian economy at independence was underdeveloped and overwhelmed with all the characteristics of underdeveloped economies. Hence there were among other things, the absence of a strong industrial base, unequal distribution of resources, massive unemployment, poverty and illiteracy and poor health care (Jemibewon, 2017). Though things improved for the NPF in Nigeria and Ilorin Emirate in particular after the Civil War, they again returned to the *status quo* during the oil glut which began in the early 1980s. During the Oil bust when Nigeria’s economic and social life began to wane, there were so many criminal activities in Ilorin Emirate which overwhelmed the Nigeria Police. In fact, the general public as well as enforcement agencies were all caught in the web of calamity heightened by the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) to an extent that the then Head of State, General Ibrahim Babangida had to charge the Police to arrest the increasing insecurity that bedevilled the country (Aregbesola 1986). Healthcare, housing, food, cost of essential commodities among others were so costly that some members of the Police got involved in criminal activities. A good example was in Benin, Edo State during the trial of Lawrence Anini where one of the Police personnel confessed to having participated in the robbery across

the state through information and intelligence that he offered the Armed Robbery gang. Though there was no popular armed robber like Anini in the Emirate, there were several cases of theft in the Emirate.

Constitutional Gaps

The ruling political elite in the First Republic exploited the loopholes in the independence constitution to further their political course. Such loopholes include the powers of the Police Service Commission (in the 1960s?) to appoint and dismiss the Inspector-General of Police and the Regional Commissioner of Police. The role and responsibilities of the Regional Governments in the maintenance of law and order in their respective regions were also exploited by the political class. The wanton exploitation of the constitutional loopholes by the ruling political *elite* in suppressing and oppressing those opposed to their interests and wishes led to the recourse to the use of force by the opposition parties. This heightened the tense security situation of the country and contributed in large part to the demise of the First Republic (Jemibewon, 2001).

The military incursion into Nigeria politics and the subsequent collapse of the First Republic had negative impacts on community policing in Nigeria. The unification decree of 1966 had a negative implication on Policing in Nigeria by abolishing the regional and native Police Forces and giving way for a unified national Police Force.

2. Institutional Challenges

Poor Human/Capacity Development Initiatives

Since the Police Force in Ilorin emirate is a microcosm of the Nigerian State, it also suffers from poor human capacity development initiatives. Many studies support the notion that the deployment and management of manpower resources of the police organisation have a huge influence on the success or failure of the community in Nigeria. Police agencies with an increased percentage of commissioned police officers were found to be more likely to implement community-oriented policing programmes than their counterparts with a small workforce (Zhao & Lovrich, 2005). The core aims of the human resources management of an organisation should be effectiveness, employee satisfaction, employee training, creation of incentives, discipline and appropriate deployment of personnel. Unfortunately, these core aims of human resource management are lacking in the Nigeria Police Force (Alemika & Asiwaju, 2008).

There has been no proper management of human resources in the force and there have not been enough investments in modern strategies and education as well as discipline expected from the police force. There is a wide range of different equipment used in advanced countries which are not in use in Nigeria. The redundant and stale approach used in detective exercise of their duties is another deterrent to the effectiveness of the police force. As Iwara gives a comparative analysis of detectives in the 1980s and now:

It was based on this result that I was immediately posted to the Detective School as a lecturer. Unfortunately, these days that process has been so bastardised that it requires a surgical operation. It has become an all-comers affair. ... What is seen today is that cases are taken to court without sufficient facts to prove matters beyond reasonable doubt thus; most of these cases are thrown out in courts due to poor prosecution (Ibiang, 2017).

In most cases, competence and qualifications are not given much priority in the selection process of applicants for positions in the NPF. This is a recipe for the recruiting persons of questionable character and criminal records (Dambazau, 2017).

Politicisation of the Police

The politicisation of the Nigeria Police Force also has a negative impact on the efficiency of the Nigeria Police Force. There was however a carryover of the role of the Police as a force for oppression and repression from the colonial to the post-colonial era of Nigeria history, such that there is a negative perception of the Police by the public. Just as under colonial rule, the Police were basically an instrument in the hands of the political elite in maintaining their power and compelling the obedience of the masses. The Native Authority Police Forces were easily employed by the regional politicians for their agenda. The Nigeria Police Force was also used by the politicians who held positions of power at the national level. Aside from the constraints in the ability of the Police officers to resist being used unduly by the politicians, some of the Police officers were corrupt and ambitious opportunists who were willing tools in the hands of the politicians. Because the Police have become partisan and

mostly work for the elites, this has drawn them into loggerheads with the masses. The masses took the slightest opportunities to express their anger at the Police (Rotimi, 1990).

Godfathers of highly connected criminals shielded them from the course of justice by mounting pressure on the officers of the law. In the same vein, many highly placed public officers use their closeness to politicians to pervert the course of justice. The confluence of external and internal undue influence on the operations of the police is largely responsible for the myriad of unresolved crimes across the country, particularly in the Ilorin Emirate in Kwara State (Okeshola & Mudiare, (2013). The litany of unresolved crimes in the state weakened public confidence in the police and discouraged the public from reporting crime to the police. It also discourages members of the public with useful information on committed crimes from supplying such information to the police.

The Police Service Commission (PSC) is not left out of this bipartisanship. Politicisation of the PSC is also a fundamental flaw that has been challenging the police force. Besides, the Police Council were also enmeshed in the murky waters of Nigerian politics. As some pundits observed, “The Nigerian Police Council was so constituted as to give primacy to the views of its civilian chairman and members; party politicians or their nominees at the federal and regional levels” (Tekena, 1989).

Poor Working Condition and Accommodation

The poor working conditions in the Nigeria Police Force is also another bane in Ilorin Emirate, Kwara State. In most cases, officers are not provided with the necessary logistics and infrastructure needed for quality service delivery. Alhaji Aliyu Attah at the inauguration of the Retired Inspectors General Forum (RIGENF) in Abuja in late 1992 puts it succinctly:

Officers and men go about in tattered uniforms; no barracks accommodations, training colleges are ill-equipped; the Federal Intelligence and Investigation Bureau (FIIB) fingerprint and laboratory equipment all dead; vehicles are luxuries, offices lack stationery. Above all, the men work around the clock without rest and without allowance (*The Guardian*, November 1993).

Operational vehicles are not available in most police posts, and even where they are available, they are not always in good shape. This compels officers to convey themselves to their destinations most times through commercial transport which could expose them or their families. In some cases, officers use their money to buy recharge cards to make calls on cases, buy petrol for their vehicles, buy torches and candles to use in their offices, and buy biros and writing materials they need for their work. The officers who are lucky enough to be provided with living quarters in barracks live in a deplorable environment. More so, there is the absence of meaningful insurance cover that will guarantee their family will not suffer in case they die in service. There are instances where living colleagues contribute money to bury their dead colleague. These and many more deplorable conditions of work discourages officers of the force from giving their best to the community they are meant to serve (Ojo & Adebayo, 2006). For instance, there were many reports that the Police were being owed salaries running into months as of August 1993. The then Police IG, Alhaji Ibrahim Coomasie was quoted to have put the figure owed at ₦2 billion (Jemibewon, 2001).

The working condition of the police in Ilorin Emirate, Kwara State is deplorable to the extent that over 60% of the Policemen live in private quarters. This makes it difficult to effectively mobilise the officers in emergency situations (Oral interview with Chief Sunday Adewusi, Rtd. IGP, 2015). This is a general phenomenon even at the national level. To be sure, the late Sanni Abacha observed that:

Structural problems which have over the years become so endemic that is now extremely difficult, if not impossible for even the dedicated officers to operate well and function optimally. These problems range from the attitudinal to the infrastructural, from the administrative to the attendant low morale. These are problems which are evidently comprehensive in magnitude and protracted in duration (Jemibewon, 2001).

Lack of adequate barrack accommodation is a major challenge that has militated against the effective performance of the Nigeria Police in controlling crimes in the Emirate and Kwara State. From about 3,000 police officers in Kwara State and about half stationed in the Emirate, only about a few hundred have accommodation within the barracks (Oral Interview with Ibrahim Muhammed March 2022). Studies show that well over 60 per cent of the Policemen live in private quarters (Alabi, 2010). Consequently, in an emergency situation, it is usually very difficult to assemble the officers and men for effective deployment.

There have also been problems of communication and transportation. The Armed Forces, Federal Ministries and Parastatals make frequent use of the Police communication network. This has increased the workload, with the resultant adverse effects on its effectiveness to Police services. The transportation system of the Police is very poor (Otu 2004, Okiro 2007). The Police always have few vehicles at their disposal to mobilise the men for smooth operations. In most cases some of the vehicles are old, and often the Policemen complain about insufficient fuel in the vehicles. This of course, in no small measure, has been militating against the easy mobility of the force especially in combating crimes. Coupled with a shortage of manpower in the force, the quality of policing in the country and the Ilorin Emirate remains poor.

Proliferation of Illegal Private Guards

Across Nigeria, many people prefer local settlement of disputes without recourse to the police, even when the police are available (Ogbozor, 2016). The proliferation of private illegal informal policing institutions in Ilorin, Kwara State is another hindering factor. In most communities, the informal security outfits are preferred to the formal agencies. The public prefer the informal security outfits because of their availability, trust and effectiveness. In Ilorin Emirate, some rely on private guards and settle disputes personally. The existence of the informal policing institutions poses serious challenges to the operational conduct of conventional police institutions. Many people in Ilorin Emirate find it more appealing to engage informal policing institutions than state-police institution. There are also instances of clashes between the informal security organisations and the state-owned security agency such as the Police. The clashes are occasioned by the crude means employed by the informal policing institutions in crime detection and prevention (Oral interview with Rtd. ACP Aminu Isah). As a respondent puts it, “cordial relations between police and informal policing institutions are necessary because the informal policing institutions can reach areas where the police cannot reach, however this has been lacking” (Oral interview with Rtd. ACP Ibrahim Mustapha)

The first is the Private Security Guards. In 1985 the Federal Military Government approved the establishment of Private Security and Guards, because of the rise of crime and insecurity in society. The approval however took effect from 1986 when it was given a re-organisation scheme with Private Guard Companies Act 1986 (No. 23). Though the responsibility for the control and management of private guards in Nigeria remained under the control of the Nigeria Police Force until 28th June 2003, an Act to give statutory backing to the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) passed by the National Assembly was signed into law by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, GCFR, the former president and Commander in chief of the Armed Forces, Federal Republic of Nigeria. More importantly, many of these private security guards, which are now under the purview of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) like other law enforcement agencies and security outfits, suffer inter and intra-agency rivalry which often widens the gap between security units and the citizenry (Marizu 2007, Eme 2018, Dappa & Omale 2016). This has among other things been further exacerbated by the blurring of lines and roles of the private guards (Ikuteyojo, 2009).

Absence of Public-Oriented Policing

There is also the absence of deep knowledge of public-oriented policing in Kwara State. As a matter of fact, accurate knowledge of public-oriented policing is limited in Africa. Very few of the police officers have a good understanding of the core principles of community/public-oriented policing (Marenin, 2009). The use of the English language in official publications and some police publications also creates a communication gap between some sections of the populace and the police. This is because of the presence of a large percentage of citizens who are illiterate in the western sense. Such abused minds have seen the Police as an extension of their old ways and a tenet to not just hold power to achieve their ulterior motive, but also to oppress the citizenry. Thus, some police officers who are supposed to uphold the law are found wanting in many respects which include but are not limited to indulgence in alcoholism, bribery, and unjust punishment of wrongdoers.

Dynamic Nature of Crimes

The crimes witnessed during pre-colonial and colonial periods are indeed different from what obtained in the post-colonial era. For instance, the advent of information and communication technology as well as the internet among others has also changed the dynamics of crimes. Some of these new crimes are internet fraud, travelling racket, visa fraud, passport fraud, certificate fraud among other crimes which were less present or totally absent before independence. While many types of crime existed ranging from theft, murder to child stealing, religious crises seem to have risen between the 1980s up to 2003. According to Arowona, Aliede, Odobo, (2004),

In 1986, for instance, some Muslim youths attacked a Christian group for taking a Palm Sunday procession to traditionally Muslim parts of Ilorin resulting in many injuries. In 2004, a planned Reinhard Bonnke crusade in Ilorin was aborted due to intense Muslim opposition (Akande & Hadi, n.d.). Furthermore, Muslim critique of secular law in the state has led to the introduction of hijab-wearing for Muslim students in public schools resulting in aggressive demands by Christians for a re-privatisation of former missionary schools under the control of the state government.

Poor Intelligence Gathering

There is also the challenge of poor intelligence gathering by the Police in Ilorin Emirate just like other parts of the country. Often, the crime would have been committed before the police sluggishly responds. A good example to buttress this point was in 1995 when there was a bomb explosion at the launching of the Family Support Programme (FSP) at the Ilorin stadium, which resulted in the killing of two people and the injury of many others (Idachaba, 2001). The situation had a ripple effect not only in Ilorin Emirate but across the country.

Lack of Scientific/Technological Application

The Nigeria Police still lag in terms of solving crimes with modern scientific and technological advancements from 1960 up to 2003. The use of torture, intimidation and in fact, arresting family members of an alleged criminal in lieu of the alleged criminal to force the alleged criminal out of hiding has not only hindered criminal investigation, but it has also posed a serious credibility issue when eyewitnesses want to give testimonies. For instance, a man who was once a victim narrated how he witnessed a crime and reported to the station but he was surprised that rather than letting him go, he was asked to help them with the investigation (Oral interview with a trader, 2020). Another woman narrated how one of her sons was put behind police cell because one of his sons' friends committed a crime while he was an undergraduate at Offa Polytechnic in the 1990s (Oral interview with a market woman, 2020). No doubt that in cases where there was scientific knowledge, the homes of these people may only be wired to get information from them and arrest the real culprits. Most especially, the lack of scientific and technological knowledge affects how to find an ongoing crime. If there were a Geographic Information System, locating an ongoing robbery for instance would be easy.

Poor Response to Crime Alert/Distress Call

One of the cruxes that the public has had with the Police in Nigeria and Ilorin Emirate is the belief that the Police do not respond appropriately to crime alerts or distress calls. While the public is quick to judge the Police on this, the public has never queried if the Police are well funded to fuel its vehicle. The poor road network has also been given as one of the challenges of responding to distress calls as well as pranks by some members of the public. On a few occasions, the Police had been called to be ambushed by criminals. An example was in 1999 when youths confronted the police while trying to protect a church during a religious crisis in the State (BBC, 1999). While not holding brief for the Police, many people complain that they usually arrive at crime scenes after the armed robbers and criminals had had their day. As a victim once put it:

Police response to distress calls is poor in Ilorin Emirate. Sometimes when you call them, they will tell you to give your location and every details but they will not come until the next morning. And if they arrived, it is usually after the crime had been successfully carried out and this raises some questions about whether the Police are not in cahoots with some of these criminals. The day I called them, they did not come and even when I went to the nearest station the next morning, the questions they were asking made me to drop the case. If the Police can do as they do abroad where you dial a number and before you know, many police vehicles will arrive, and crimes will reduce (Oral interview with a carpenter, 2020).

The above is still a daydream of every Ilorin person. However, it remains a pipe dream even after several decades of independence and the establishment of Kwara State.

No Criminal Data Bank

Since independence, the Nigeria Police Force at both national and Ilorin Emirate did not have a criminal data bank which would have helped to solve a good number of minor and major crimes up to 1999. Attempts to get this data bank set up had been the intention of the Police leaders from the independence era but they have lacked the political will to implement it. While the government as well as the Inspectors-General complained of inadequate funding to import the technology, no attempt was ever made to seek local production even as the Police recruited expatriates in some specialised fields such as computer science, data sciences and even sent some of its finest personnel abroad to acquire the knowledge.

Ill-Equipped and Poor Gun Handling

In addition, the Nigeria Police Force in Nigeria as a whole (and Kwara in particular) is ill-equipped. The Nigeria Police still make use of the “Mark-4 rifle”, “SMG” rifle, K-2 rifle which cannot match the sophisticated arms and ammunition used by criminals. The shortage and low quality of arms and ammunition are worsened by the fact that constables who form the bulk of the force are not allowed to bear firearms. Attempts by Police head like IGP Kam Salem to import armoured plated vehicles in 1971 were misinterpreted by the Gowon regime as an attempt to compete with the military. Similarly, when the Shehu Shagari administration ordered arms and ammunition for the Police, it did not get to the country until the military took over (Jemibewon, 2001). Ill-Equipment and accidental discharge are some of the characteristics of some of the newly recruited constables (Oral Interview with ASP Ahmodu Musa, 2021). As a scholar once posited, sometimes the Police do not have the requisite knowledge and equipment to handle and successfully prosecute perpetrators of some crimes (Alemika, 2001) such as human trafficking as a result of poor knowledge and equipment.

Also, the kind of guns the Police handle does not conform to international best practices. Ideally, only special units of the Police should handle most of these AK47 and Ak49 or pump action rifles that members of the Police now parade around the streets and even during elections. A serious concern has also been the way most of these guns are handled as news of accidental discharge has trailed the Police in Nigeria, including Ilorin Emirate. Any wonder then that a columnist argued that the problems of the Nigeria Police in the early 1990s were equipping them to resemble an army of occupation (Osadolor, 1991).

Selective Justice

There have been cases of selective justice. The fact that most police activities focus on the crimes of the poor, minorities, and less privileged in Kwara State alienates this section of the State from the police. The problem emanates from police bias towards the political, economic and religious elite class. Due to religiosity and ethnicity, there were some cases of selective justice in the Ilorin emirate. Similarly, while the highly popular and wealthy ones enjoy justice, the poor and less privileged are over-policed (Hess, Markson & Stein, 1992). This situation is more commonplace in Nigeria and Kwara State where selective enforcement of law is the rule rather than the exception.

Shortage of Staff

From independence, the Police had never been sufficient to control the Nigerian State and Ilorin Emirate in particular. Though efforts were made by different military regimes, these efforts were never enough. The Murtala Mohammed regime even embarked on a civil service purge in 1975 which affected all aspects of the country including the Police (Jemibewon, 2001).

A former President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, a former Inspector-General of Police in Nigeria, Mike Okiro, and a legal luminary, Femi Falana (SAN) all expressed the gross deficiency in the number of Police personnel in Nigeria at different for a (Kayode-Adedeji, 2019). Aside from the shortage of personnel in the Nigeria Police Force, there is also the challenge of inefficient recruitment into the Force. Merit and competent is usually sacrificed on the altar of religious and ethnic qualifications, leaving the Force a large chunk of officers with a low academic background, questionable character and criminal records (Dambazau, 2007).

Year	Establishment	Strength	Vacancy
1997	200,925	160,558	40,367
1998	200,925	157,242	43,683
1999	205,835	135,712	70,123
2000	232,858	160,240	72,618
2001	232,858	180,056	53,304
2002	577,608	193,570	384,034
2003	577,608	234,316	343,288
2004	417,608	311,941	106,081
2005	417,608	309,049	110,657
2006	577,612	318,610	270,465
2007	577,608	316,684	273,948

Figure 2: Table showing the establishment, strength and vacancy in the NPF from 1997 – 2007 (Ojo, 2011)

In Ilorin, Kwara State and Nigeria as a whole, there is also a dearth of manpower at the various police departments. Between 1997 and 2003, Figure 2 show gross lack of manpower within the police. Though that of Kwara is not available, that of the country could give a general idea of what is obtained there. As of 2006, the Zone 8 of the Nigeria Police Force (comprising Kwara, Kogi, and Ekiti states) had a combined police staff strength of 12,320 officers. Kwara State has a staff strength of only 4,325 officers (Ojoye, 2020). Going by the population of Kwara state according to the 2006 National Population Census figure (3,278,478), Kwara state had a ratio of one police officer to 758 citizens. The shortage of manpower in Kwara state and Nigeria as whole limits the effective presence of the police in most parts of Kwara state. This has however not improved after even two decades. The force which is the principal law enforcement agency in Nigeria had a staff strength of about 301,737 consisting of thirty-six (36) commands grouped in twelve (12) zones and seven (7) administrative organs. This translates to a ratio of one police officer to six hundred and sixty-two (662) citizens as at 2019 (Ojoye, 2020). This is a far cry from the United Nations recommended ratio of one (1) police officer to four hundred (400) citizens (The Punch, 2020). Obviously, the current policing manpower in Kwara is incapable of meeting the security needs of the population in the state.

1997	1:1000
1998	1:1200
1999	1:800
2000	1:556
2001	1:492
2002	1:457
2003	1:488
2004	1:439
2005	1:446
2006	1:440
2007	1:538

Figure 3: Police – Citizens Ratio (1997 – 2007) (Ojo, 2016)

Indiscipline/Changing Orientation

There seems to be a continuity of the order in terms of indiscipline and reasons for joining the Police in Ilorin Emirate and Nigeria as a whole. From a zealous agency in the colonial era and up to the 1980s, the Police orientation changed due to the recruitment of those who were wayward or those who were forced to join the Force due to the unemployment rate in the country. Iwara Ibiang in his 35 years of experience writes in his memoirs:

The selection was thorough and the aura was so much that a single “constable” could arrest a whole village, talk less of a “sergeant”, which was the all-powerful rank. These days, we find all manner of unrepentant persons: armed robbers, political thugs, cultists, harlots, militants and rapists inundating our forces. What happens can better be imagined if such officers find themselves within the management team (Ibiang, 2017)

Furthermore, the established system whereby patrol officers reviewed officers’ notes during beat patrols diminished with time. As Iwara Ibiang, once again stated that:

At your beat, you were expected to be alert and walk around your area of coverage, taking note of observations made in your pocket. During the eight-hourly duties over five officers would have visited you and made remarks in your pocket notebook. In fact, you had no dull moments as vehicular patrol teams were also patrolling the area (2017).

The issue of indiscipline also manifested sometime in 2002, when the Police embarked on a strike. Though it started as a little conflict in a southeast state, it quickly spread to every part of the country, which the government had to call on the military to cover for their police counterparts. The then Police Affairs Minister, Steven Akiga described the action not as an act of indiscipline or industrial disharmony but a mutiny which is unheard of. As he puts it:

The federal government wishes to state emphatically that we do not regard the action of the policemen concerned as a strike but mutiny, the implications of which are very grave. In recognition of the fact that some policemen have abandoned their duty posts, all sensitive points will be manned by the military. Similarly, all essential escort duties that need to be performed will be handled by the military (Reuters, 2002).

Conclusion

The Nigeria Police Force in Ilorin Emirate, Kwara State, from 1960 to 1999, operated within a framework of systemic challenges that significantly eroded public trust. The colonial legacy of coercive policing, perpetuated by military rule, fostered a culture of brutality, corruption, and disconnection from community values. Centralisation, inadequate funding, poor training, and politicisation further weakened the NPF’s effectiveness, while socio-economic hardships exacerbated crime rates and police complicity. The proliferation of informal security outfits and the absence of a criminal database underscored the NPF’s operational deficiencies. Addressing these issues requires decentralising the police structure, enhancing training, improving working conditions, and fostering genuine community partnerships to rebuild trust and improve policing efficacy in Ilorin Emirate and beyond.

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